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Germany After the Elections: Implications for U.S.-German Relations
Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats
Committee on International Relations
House of Representatives
November 9, 2005

Mr. Chairman, I wish to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify before this Subcommittee on the subject of "Germany After the Elections." It is a distinct pleasure for me to be here today and to share with you my thoughts on German foreign policy under a new government. I would like to request that my statement be placed in the record.

Germany is now in its second month of limbo following an unexpectedly close, inconclusive election on September 18. The large, right-of-center Christian Democrats (CDU), together with their smaller sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), were expected to sail to victory by forming a coalition with their preferred partner, the Free Democrats (FDP). The CDU/CSU, however, garnered only 35.2% of the vote, a 3.3 percentage point drop from 2002. Despite the good showing of the FDP with 9.8%, the parties did not have enough combined support for the expected governing coalition. The large, left-of-center Social Democrats (SPD) of sitting Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder also "lost" the election with only 34.3% of the vote, representing a drop of 4.2 percentage points from the 2002 election. The coalition of SPD and Greens had been voted out of office. What was less clear is what political constellation 78% of the German electorate intended to vote *into* office.

Despite some rough sledding since the elections, Germany's two major parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, appear now to be on a solid path to forming a government, a so-called "Grand Coalition," by the end of this month under a CDU Chancellor, Angela Merkel. It is possible that this process could be derailed over the coming weeks, but the analysis that follows is premised on such a government taking office.

German Foreign Policy After Schroeder

On the foreign policy front, the central question is whether a Merkel government will be an agent of the status quo or an agent of change. The conventional wisdom is that we should expect no major changes in German foreign policy going forward.

In part, this view is based on the structure of a coalition government. While there has been a "Grand Coalition" only once before (from 1966-69 in West Germany), coalition governments are in fact the norm in German politics. Within those coalitions, the largest

party traditionally has named the Chancellor and the smaller partner, the Foreign Minister.

In the current case, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Schroeder's closest aide in the Chancellery, has been named to serve as Foreign Minister in a Merkel government. The relative consensus on foreign policy across party lines is illustrated by the fact that, in the ongoing coalition negotiations, the party representatives were able to conclude their discussions on foreign policy with relative ease. The negotiators readily reached agreement on every issue save Turkey's relationship with the European Union, with the parties holding open the question of whether explicit reference should be made to the fact that Turkey's membership negotiations with the EU could end in some sort of "privileged partnership," rather than full membership. The CDU/CSU has been promoting the view that full membership for Turkey would overburden the EU politically, economically, and socially and thus they advocate something short of full membership and stress the "open-ended" nature of the accession talks. The Social Democrats have been stalwart defenders of Turkey's quest for full membership.

While I agree that the broad parameters of Germany's foreign policy are unlikely to change, I believe that – contrary to the conventional wisdom – we will see important differences on a few key issues as a result of the significant impact outgoing Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's personalized style of conducting foreign policy had on U.S.-German relations. Let me offer two examples.

First, Schroeder gave a whole new meaning to the Franco-German partnership by throwing his lot in with French President Jacques Chirac, to a large extent, as a counterweight to U.S. policy. The bond between Schroeder and Chirac was solidified and strengthened as they joined forces in opposing the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Beyond the dramatic case of Iraq, that Franco-German alliance had broad implications in other areas, for example, on China policy. France was the EU member state leading the charge to lift the EU's arms embargo on China and Schroeder gave Chirac his unflagging support in that effort. One motive underlying Schroeder's stance was what he saw as Germany's key economic interests in China, but another clearly was the importance he placed on his partnership with Chirac. The opposition CDU/CSU, as well as the Free Democrats, opposed what they saw as Schroeder's rush to lift the embargo and voiced sympathy with U.S. concerns about the human rights situation in China and about the strategic balance in the Taiwan straits. Notably, Schroeder's support for an embargo lift was shared neither by his own party, the Social Democrats, nor by his coalition partner, the Greens. In fact, the SPD and the Greens introduced a parliamentary motion on October 28, 2004 in favor of maintaining the embargo that received majority support. Thus, with Schroeder gone, the new German government appears poised to oppose a lift of the EU's China arms embargo**.** That change in German position will have a significant impact on EU policy, because France has lost its key ally in pushing for a lift and because any member state, in this case a Germany under Angela Merkel, can veto a lift.

Second, Schroeder struck up such a close friendship with Russian President Putin that his sleigh ride with Putin for Orthodox Christmas in January 2001 has come to rival the

"sauna summits" former Chancellor Helmut Kohl was famous for holding with Boris Yeltsin as a symbol of a special Russo-German relationship. Just last month, following the German election, Schroeder visited the Russian President in Saint Petersburg to celebrate Putin's 53rd birthday. That October visit marked the eighth meeting between the two leaders this year.[1] Angela Merkel clearly indicated during the election campaign that she would pursue a different policy toward Russia. The most basic reason for Merkel's approach results from her personal biography. Much of the press comment on Merkel has focused on the fact that she will be Germany's first female chancellor. Equally notable, however, is the fact that she will be Germany's first chancellor from the eastern, formerly communist, part of the country. Merkel's experience and her attitudes towards the countries bordering Germany's east, most notably Poland, have led her to criticize Schroeder's actions in dealing with Russia as disregarding the interests of Germany's central European allies. Germany has strong economic interests governing its relationship with Russia, particularly in the energy field (Germany imports roughly 30% of its oil and natural gas from Russia), and Merkel will be as attentive to Russia as Schroeder was. It seems clear, however, that she will also factor in the interests of the central Europeans and will be much more inclusive in discussing Germany's Russia policy with them. Germany has traditionally looked out for the interests of the smaller EU member states, a tradition that Schroeder eschewed and Merkel seems likely to restore beyond the specific issue area of Russia.

The Washington-Berlin Connection

The Bush Administration will welcome a new German approach to China and Russia, as well as a more inclusive German approach to its smaller, and particularly eastern, EU partners, countries that are also strong U.S. allies. The larger question, however, is whether Washington can expect a restoration of the traditionally warm and close U.S.-German relationship, which was so badly damaged over the Iraq war.

During the election campaign, Merkel's Christian Democrats pledged to "reinvigorate the trans-Atlantic cooperation with the United States."[2] When Merkel sent veteran CDU parliamentarian and foreign policy expert Wolfgang Schaeuble, now slated to be Interior Minister in a "Grand Coalition" government, to visit the White House during the campaign, he said: "We will try to be a more reliable European partner for the U.S." But what are those words likely to mean in practice?

Some analysts have expressed concern that those words will mean little in practice. They worry that Merkel's explicit opposition to full Turkish membership in the EU, a longstanding U.S. goal, will be a thorn in the side of improved U.S.-German relations. I believe this concern is misplaced. In light of the start of EU accession negotiations with Turkey on October 4 of this year, the issue has lost its political saliency and immediacy. Merkel has given no indication that she intends to disrupt the ten to fifteen year process of negotiation between the EU and Turkey and obviously she will not be chancellor at the end of that negotiation process. Thus, while it is true that a fundamental disagreement

[1] "Schroeder: Russia Visit Not the End," Deutsche Welle, Oct. 8, 2005.
[2] "Key Issues in the Campaign for Germany's Parliamentary Election," Associated Press, Sept. 16, 2005.

exists between the Bush Administration and the CDU/CSU on Turkey's relationship to the EU, there is no obvious reason for this issue to return to the front burner during the life of the incoming Grand Coalition.

Closer U.S.-German Ties? The Constraint of Public Opinion.

Much as Angela Merkel and her CDU/CSU may desire warmer relations between Berlin and Washington, one inescapable constraint will be German public opinion. The Bush Administration is not popular with most Germans and the new government is likely to proceed with caution. The dominant issue in the September election was economic reform. Germany's high unemployment and stagnant economy were the inescapable focus.[3] Progress on this economic agenda will determine the success or failure of a "Grand Coalition" government. While the German public clearly recognizes, in general, the necessity of implementing reforms, a Merkel government will need political capital to get through reforms that many Germans fear will threaten specific social welfare benefits. The devil is in the details of making abstract economic reforms concrete. Given that political capital is precious and indispensable for an economic reform agenda, the new government will likely be cautious in expending its limited capital on getting closer to Washington.

The depth of Germans' negative feeling about U.S. foreign policy is visible in poll results from Transatlantic Trends, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo. Transatlantic Trends surveyed public opinion on foreign policy in the United States and ten European countries, including Germany, in June 2005. Transatlantic Trends is an annual survey, begun in 2002, and the data underscores how German attitudes toward the United States have deteriorated over the past four years.

When asked how desirable it is that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs, 60% of Germans said this year that it was undesirable and 39%, desirable. The numbers in 2002 were almost exactly reversed: 68% of German respondents said U.S. leadership was desirable and only 27% called it undesirable.

Another question focused specifically on President Bush, asking "do you approve or disapprove of the way the President of the United States George W. Bush is handling international policies." Of the 1,000 German respondents, 83% in the recent survey said they disapproved, while only 16% approved. In 2002, 62% disapproved of President Bush's handling of international policies and 36% approved.

When you look at these two questions side by side, it suggests that Germans, from the start, were more skeptical of Bush foreign policy than of U.S. leadership generally. German respondents have been consistently critical of Bush foreign policy, with a majority registering disapproval already in 2002 and with that majority growing stronger

[3] In a pre-election public opinion survey in September 2005, *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen* asked Germans what the most important problems facing Germany were. A striking 85% of respondents said "unemployment," a full 71 percentage points ahead of the next most important problem (costs and pay).

through this year's survey. When you look at the responses to the question about U.S. leadership, you see that the majority of German respondents has flipped from embracing U.S. leadership to rejecting it. This data suggests that what we defined as anti-Bush sentiment during the first term has deteriorated into a broader anti-Americanism in the second term.

On the so-called "thermometer" question, in which German respondents were asked to rate their feelings toward various countries by reference to the temperature on a thermometer, the United States scored only 51 degrees in 2005, as compared to 63 degrees in 2002. When the question was asked, those surveyed were told that fifty means not particularly warm or cold. Thus, in 2005, it seems the best we can say is that Germans have a tepid or neutral feeling toward the United States.

These data on German public opinion reveal two significant realities. First, the Bush Administration faces an enormous public diplomacy challenge in Germany. Second, Angela Merkel confronts obvious constraints from her public as she seeks to "reinvigorate" cooperation with the United States.

Closer U.S.-German Ties? Why Style and Rhetoric Matter.

Given the unambiguous, negative view among the German public of U.S. foreign policy and the Merkel government's need to have domestic backing for its economic and social reforms, it is difficult to see the new Chancellor blazing new foreign policy paths together with Washington. Yet this situation, rife with limits, also holds within it an opportunity. The deep skepticism of the German public toward the Bush Administration means that a positive change in style and rhetoric on one or both sides has the potential to begin to change attitudes.

Part of the downturn in German public opinion concerning the U.S. role in the world is no doubt related to concrete U.S. actions, such as the war in Iraq, opposition to the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol. It may also reflect the deep freeze that immobilized German-American relations from the run-up to the Iraq war until 2004, when Schroeder's Washington visit in February indicated the first sign of a thaw. The re-election of President Bush in November 2004 led to a full-court press on the U.S. side to reach out to Europe. In the case of Germany, this was highlighted by the President's visit to Mainz in February 2005. At the joint Bush-Schroeder press conference, the President highlighted the significance of Europe being the destination of his first trip after his inauguration. He went on to say that in order for the United States to have "good relations with Europe," it needed to have "good relations with Germany."

Beyond what the Bush Administration is saying or doing, it is equally important to take stock of how Chancellor Schroeder has played the U.S. card. Arguably, negative German views of the United States have been reinforced by the way in which Chancellor Schroeder chose to characterize, for domestic political purposes, those U.S. policy choices.

Schroeder, like Helmut Kohl before him, did not come into office as a foreign policy chancellor. That said, he showed tremendous leadership in winning support to send the German military into Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001 – in the latter case, calling a vote of no confidence in the Bundestag.[4] He led a reluctant German public to fight its first wars in the post-war period.

Some would argue that Schroeder showed similar leadership on Iraq. This time German opinion backed his opposition to the war, but he stood up to his big ally, the United States and, together with Chirac and Putin, was able to prevent a second U.N. resolution, even if he and his allies were unable to prevent the war itself.

On Iraq, however, unlike on Kosovo and Afghanistan, there has been a notable tension between Schroeder's rhetoric and the reality of German actions. Schroeder's drum beat of comment, even after the war, about Washington's military "adventure" in Iraq and foreign policy decisions being "made in Berlin" suggested a much greater distance between Berlin and Washington than, in policy terms, there in fact was. Germany has, in reality, done much to support the United States and its coalition partners in Iraq, including training Iraqi police and troops, albeit outside Iraq, writing off $5 billion in debt owed to Germany by Iraq, and deploying greater numbers of German troops to Afghanistan to free up U.S. soldiers. Schroeder's consistent, public opposition to U.S. policy on Iraq has masked effectively for the German public the help his government is providing on the ground.

In Schroeder's final campaign appearances this fall, apparently wanting to remind voters of his opposition to the war in Iraq, he said Germans must decide "whether someone is able to withstand pressure from outside and stand up for what is Germany's best interest." His negative references to the United States were not limited to Iraq. He told supporters "you only need to look to America to see what poverty in old age is."[5] Or, following the election, as he addressed union members in his home city of Hanover, he criticized "Anglo-Saxon" economic policies, saying they had "no chance" in Europe. Then, in an apparent reference to Hurricane Katrina, Schroeder said: "I can think of a recent disaster that shows what happens when a country neglects its duties of state towards its people. My post as chancellor, which I still hold, does not allow me to name that country but you all know that I am talking about America."[6] When it came to discussing or portraying U.S. policy, Chancellor Schroeder was torn between being the statesman and being the populist politician.

Some in the Bush Administration maintain that the best way to put the profound disagreements of 2002-2003 behind us is for the Germans and the French to make substantial, new commitments to Iraq. Let's be honest: Angela Merkel will not send

[4] In September 2005, the German Defense Ministry announced that the Cabinet had agreed to boost troop levels by up to 750 soldiers to a total force of up to 3,000 soldiers. Germany was already the leading contributor to the International Security Assistance Force with about 2,250 troops working to secure peace and stability in Afghanistan.
[5] "German Rivals Make One Last Push," BBC News, Sept. 17, 2005.
[6] "Schroeder Confirms Exit; Slams Bush," Deutsche Welle, Oct. 12, 2005.

German troops to Iraq. Nor should the Bush Administration present that choice to her. Rather, both sides of the Atlantic can focus on, first, changing the tone of the relationship and then, moving on to change the substance. President Bush and Secretary of State Rice have begun to do this on the U.S. side and must continue to do so. A new German government is likely to do the same.

One substantive area that might be ripe for enhanced German-American cooperation is democracy promotion. The Transatlantic Trends survey referenced earlier found, in June 2005, that 78% of Germans think it should be the role of the European Union to help establish democracy in other countries, as compared to 51% of Americans who saw this as a role for the United States. The lower number in the United States reflects the fact that democracy promotion is seen through a partisan prism here with 76% of Republicans and only 43% of Democrats supporting a U.S. role in helping establish democracy elsewhere.[7] When asked about concrete measures, such as supporting independent groups like trade unions and human rights associations or imposing political and economic sanctions, support on both sides of the Atlantic was roughly similar. In fact, Europeans and Americans are already working closely together to foster democratic transitions in places like Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Lebanon. When Angela Merkel assumes the chancellorship, deepening and widening German-American cooperation on democracy promotion, either bilaterally or in the European context, would be an ideal agenda item for her first meeting with President Bush.

A change in style and rhetoric can make a critical difference. Such a change can establish the foundation for concrete policy initiatives. If Angela Merkel can close the gap between German rhetoric and German actions, she could go a long way to rebuilding trust across the Atlantic. For those of us who continue to believe that more unites us than divides us, this would be a welcome change.

[7] This likely reflects the fact that democracy promotion is such a central part of the second Bush Administration's agenda. As the President said in his inaugural address in January of this year: "The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world…So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."